

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland United Methodist Church
150th Anniversary Project

History of Methodism in Poland

O.H. 175

THELMA G. MCCAULEY

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

May 11, 1981

THELMA G. MCCAULEY

Thelma G. McCauley was born on July 8, 1909, the daughter of Joseph and Mary Singleton in Avansmore, Pennsylvania. Thelma was only able to complete elementary school and unfortunately, because of personal reasons, could not attend high school. She married May 1, 1926 to a Mr. Eugene McCauley and raised a family of three.

She has never been employed and is completely satisfied with her domestic role. She's an active member of Poland's United Methodist Church and enjoys cooking and sewing as means of relaxing.

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INTERVIEWEE: THELMA G. McCAULEY

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: Values, family, cohesiveness, relocation,
symbolization

DATE: May 11, 1981

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Thelma McCauley for the Youngstown State University 150th Anniversary of Poland's United Methodist Church by Wilfredo Rivera at 134 North Main Street, Poland, Ohio on May 11, 1981 at approximately 1:30 p.m.

Mrs. McCauley, where was your father born and your mother and what were some of the stories you recall about your family's past?

M: Well, my father was born in Natrona, Pennsylvania. He was about 21 years old when he was married to my mother. That was in 1898. Mother was born in Apollo, Pennsylvania. My mother had seven children. She died at 36 years of age. So, I didn't know too much about her. I was just eight years old. She left my baby sister just three days old.

My father worked in a foundry, worked with hot metal. I can remember at one time he was badly burned and was in bed quite a long time with bad burns. After my mother died, he kept a housekeeper for us. Four years later after her death, he remarried a woman whose husband had died in the flu epidemic. She had four children and he raised all of us.

R: What were some of the values that were stressed by your father after your mother died? Was it hard work? Was it religion? Was it education or was it a career?

M: Well, he wanted the boys especially to get an education. My one brother went to school, but he never finished college. Before he was married, he went into a mill. Then my other brother, Cecil, was like a mother to us. He was, I would say, thirteen when our mother died. So, he sort of took charge and my father depended on him to see that we were kept straight.

As I remember back, we didn't have a whole lot of church schooling then, as we did after he married my step-mother and we got into Sunday School and church. But we didn't belong to any one church, we just went to a church close to home.

R: Was it Methodist?

M: No, I can remember we went to the Presbyterian Church. Then when we moved to another town, we were in the Lutheran Church. My dad after his second wife died, he and his sister lived together, my Aunt Blanche. They were involved in Lutheran Church then.

R: How did you get involved with the Methodist Church? When did you get involved with the Methodist Church?

M: Well, when I married my husband, he belonged to the Methodist Church in Leechburg, Pennsylvania in 1926. Shortly after we were married we moved to Warren, Ohio. My husband came out there to work at Republic Steel. We joined the Methodist Church in Warren, Ohio, Tod Avenue Methodist. Since 1927 we've been Methodist.

R: How did you get yourself involved with the Poland Methodist Church?

M: Well, let's see, after 1935 we moved down here to Poland. Of course, we lived in Wagner's house right across the street from the church. We started over there right away. Reverend Bryenton was the minister then and he took us into the church in 1935.

R: What do you remember about this Mr. Bryenton or Reverend Bryenton?

M: Well, he seemed quite elderly to me. I know he lived to be, I think, in his late 80's. But he seemed old to me when we joined. But he was very gentle and kind. We enjoyed the people. I still know all of them that I met when we joined the church.

B: When you joined the church, how many members were there in the congregation?

M: Well, it was a small church, I don't know, I'd say maybe 300.

R: Where was this church located?

M: Well now, I don't know the exact address. It was down here where the bank is now. That was the church that burned on April 1, 1957.

R: How big was your personal family?

M: Well, when my mother died, she left seven of us. Of my father when he remarried, why then I had three step-brothers and a step-sister.

R: How big was your family, the one you brought up?

M: Just three, two girls and one boy.

R: What were some of the values that you stressed to your kids?

M: Well, they were in Sunday School and church every Sunday. That was a must. There was never any question. When you got up Sunday morning, you just got ready for church and Sunday School.

We raised three beautiful children. They never caused us any concern at all.

R: During the 1930's when you first came into this new church, this church over here in Poland, how involved did you become with it?

M: Well, very much so. I helped. If there were dinners being put on, why, I was right there in the kitchen helping. I was chairman of the different groups. In those days, the Women's Society had what they call circles, but we were rainbow colors when it started out. Now it's named Bible Women. But I was very active. It was a missionary society.

R: Were you just as active during the 1940's?

M: I have been all my life, ever since I joined, I'm chairman right now of the Dorcas Circle. I'm taking my group May 20th out to Mahoning County Home. One of our women is out there. She will have devotions for us. We'll have our program out there in the little chapel in the Mahoning County Home.

R: This church that burned down in 1957, Could you tell me something about the structure of the church and what you remember most about the church?

M: Well, everyone just seemed to be active, Every time the church needed painting or remodeling, it just seemed our own church family worked at it. We had a couple of Mershmer men, Ford Mershmer and his brother Wayne--they were carpenters. It just seemed that we had someone in the church at the time that could do the work that was needed. They would remodel and the men would paint.

I remember our choir of the young people needed robes. Mr. McCauley used to sell Christmas trees out here on the lot every Christmas. He'd drive over to Cook's Forest and leave early in the morning and come back with a load of trees by 9:00 or 10:00 that evening. So, we let the youth sell the trees that one year in order to buy new robes for them. We have a nice picture of that.

I can remember when they broke ground for the educational building that was put on to the back end of our church. Everyone was active in that in order to raise the money so we could put on an educational building.

R: Could you tell me more about this educational building? What was it's primary function?

M: Well, it was a big dining room. Of course, it could be sectioned off into classrooms. Upstairs then, up over the educational part, there was a women's parlor. We could have our meetings in there. There was a small kitchen off of that. You could just serve your little teas up there in that parlor upstairs.

R: Who did the teaching? Did the church hire somebody to come in and do the teaching?

M: Oh no. No, the teachers were all . . .

R: Volunteer?

M: Volunteer teachers. I can remember when our church burned here. Then of course, we had no place to meet. At that time, Grandma Conklin lived right next door to us. Mable Conklin, and she was our teacher at the time. So, she invited people up, all the class, to her house. We had our Sunday School lesson right there in her home. They came to our basement here several Sundays until

we got a place to meet. Then they went up to North Elementary School,

R: Where were the services held at the time of the fire?

M: Well, up at the school.

R: How would the people react in the community and how would the churches react to the fire? How did they assist? How would they assist the people?

M: Well of course, they offered to do anything at all possible that they could. But we weren't very long in getting . . . the next Sunday or so we were in the school up here. So, we didn't have to meet in any other churches at all.

Everybody was saddened, of course, to see the church burning. They did all they could to help us.

R: Why didn't the people just remodel the burned down church? Did they want that or did they want to relocate?

M: Well, they had a meeting, of course, and I think that it would have involved an awful lot of money to remodel. Then at that time, they said in order to build, we had to have a certain amount of parking space. So, that's why they moved up where they did move, in order to get the extra ground around for parking, because we didn't have much of a parking lot down here. We were parking on the streets.

R: Who was the minister at the church at the time of the burning?

M: Reverend Dean Marston.

R: What do you recall about his background?

M: He was--I don't know. We didn't take to him too well for some reason or other. I understand the people that like him think kindly of him. But I'd rather not say too much more.

R: How did people get themselves involved to relocate themselves to their present site?

M: Well, I think it was through my sister's husband, Clarence McCormick. He taught in the Sunday School for, I would say, 45 years, maybe longer. He was really invol-

ved in the church. He was treasurer of the church for 20 some years, He and Ernie Withers and Bob Lewis were involved in that, in finding a location. Ernie owned the ground up there at the time, I'm sure through him we'd gotten the ground that was donated from him to relocate where we did.

R: Do you recall what year that church was finally completed?

M: I don't really know exactly--I would say 1958--because each year we would do something more in order to finish it. For a year anyway, we met in the fellowship hall where we just had folding chairs. Then we moved into the sanctuary and had to use folding chairs. It wasn't plastered yet.

Mary Withers was gracious to make drapes and all. I don't know what the church every would have done without them. They just seemed to be able to go ahead and made things do.

R: Who would you say was the most prominent minister during the 1950's and 1960's of your church?

M: During the 1950's and 1960's? Norman Parr. We liked him very well. He was a very active person. We liked him very much.

R: During the 1940's and 1950's, what event would you say really shined for the church? What would you say was the major event?

M: The educational building.

R: How about--besides the burning of the church in 1957--the early 1960's and the 1970's itself?

M: Well, of course, in the 1960's we were really thrilled each time we got money knowing that we could go ahead with our church. Then when we finally did build up there, the Sunday School class that I belonged to, there were about eight of us, we raised around \$20,000 on our own just baking pies. We would serve the Kiwanis dinner in our church once a week. We just did everything we could to raise money in order to get things for our church. Our class bought a big salad refrigerator. We furnished our own classrooms with desks and chairs and carpet on the floor and had the room painted and draped.

We helped the Men's McKinley Class with their classrooms. We helped buy drapes for their rooms. I would say fur-

nishing the new church and getting things started.

R: What was done in regards to fund raising? What activities did the church get involved with in order to acquire the money necessary to build the church?

M: A fund raising drive and we had a concession stand out at the fair. That was hard work. I would work twelve and fourteen hours a day. There were three women of us, Mabel Miller and Minnie Kenney and I had charge of the kitchen at the church. All food was prepared here at the church and hauled out there to the fair. We would be open out there, I would say, eight hours.

Of course, during the fair, we had the refrigerated cases that could handle jello salads and all kinds of meats. Armour brought a refrigerated truck out and parked it right back of our kitchen there at the church for any time meat was needed. They would come out everyday and furnish it with fresh meat. We would just go out there to the truck when we needed meat. We had pork chops and chicken and sloppy joes and hamburgers and wieners and roast beef.

R: Were there any other activities that your members got involved with besides the one at the Canfield Fair?

M: The Sunday School class of ours baked pies every day or every day that we had an order. But we furnished the pies for several years for the Masonic Temple in Youngstown. There's about eight different organizations in there, the men and the women organizations.

R: How did the people react or the congregation react to when Kennedy got shot, John Kennedy?

M: I know that it was very shocking. I would say they were very sorrowful, of course, to think that anything like that could happen in the United States.

R: Was any money donated by your church in memory of John Kennedy?

M: I couldn't say for sure about that.

R: How did your church react to the Vietnam era?

M: Well, I know a lot of people thought it was unnecessary for our boys to be over there. It wasn't a declared war. I think they thought that we shouldn't have really

been involved with it at all because that had been going on years before. I know they probably weren't in favor of it at all. Of course, the church isn't in favor of war at any time. But we did get involved.

R: What event stands out most in the 1970's and early 1980's now?

M: I think one was the burning of our mortgage. We, Mr. McCauley and I, when they decided to build, why, we gave as much as we could. We made a pledge and paid on it for several years. I think the day that we burned our mortgage--which I don't remember the date right now--that was one of the biggest times in our lives. We never expected to live to see it paid for.

R: How long did it take to pay off the mortgage?

M: I think around fifteen years, maybe not quite that long. Our congregation all seemed to be happy to pay into it well. That was one of our main ambitions was to get the church paid for.

Out at the fair we would work real hard. We never quite cleared in the eight days, \$10,000. I remember once it was \$9,000 and something, but we never seemed to be able to make \$10,000. That was a lot of money in that many days, clear money.

R: Who's your present minister?

M: Our present minister is Joseph Santomen.

R: And what are your feelings about Reverend Santomen?

M: Oh, I love him. He's very nice, very friendly. We think he's just tops. His sermons are from the Bible and he is really sincere; you get a lot out of them. So often he will come down out of the pulpit and place himself on our level in the person of like; after Easter he came down and was one of the apostles . . . He pretended he was Peter and talked to you just like Peter would if he was there. He comes down and talks to you right on your level, more like you're talking to Peter.

R: What do you think he is trying to get across by playing this role?

M: I think he realizes that it makes it more personal. That way you really get to know just how His apostles felt. At one time, he just came down and talked at

Christmastime like Joseph. But I think it makes it more personal. You realize what the person was like and what Joseph was like and how he felt about things.

- R: Is he, more or less, trying to impress to young people that it is necessary to have that faith, the Methodist faith?
- M: No, he doesn't teach any one faith. I think he believes that's up to the individual as to what faith. If they want to be Catholic, why that's the way I feel, too. If the person is going to church and is a good Catholic, why, more power to them. We are all wanting to go to the same place. We believe in Jesus Christ. I can say that everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.
- R: How involved is your church with the surrounding churches in Poland?
- M: Oh, they're very much involved. At Thanksgiving time the churches all go together for a Thanksgiving service. We're much more involved now than we used to be.
- R: Have you heard about this Interfaith Council that exists in Poland?
- M: No, I have never been involved with that at all.
- R: What are your personal feelings about churches getting involved with each other?
- M: I believe in that. It makes for a better church if everyone is congenial and happy with one another.
- R: Mrs. McCauley, have you heard anything about this celebration of this 150th committee?
- M: No, I haven't. I was just called by our secretary and that someone would be interviewing us for the history of the church. That's all I heard. I'm sure we will all be active when the time comes.
- R: What does an event like this symbolize to you?
- M: I think it's a good thing to bring out the past history of your church and shows your growth.
- R: What would something like this mean to the community?
- M: I think they would all welcome us and be glad to have

a past history like that,

R: Could you tell me something of a little history of the music that is performed in your church services?

M: I think we have a very good or one of the best directors around in our church. We had the choir. The choir seems to be very dedicated to their work. They do put on some beautiful music, especially when we celebrate at Christmastime.

R: Who is the present director?

M: Dan Santelli. His daughter goes to Youngstown College, maybe she is graduated now from the School of Music in there. She has a beautiful voice. She sings solo once in awhile for us on Sunday. They often bring men or women from the school out to our church to sing and take different parts in what the choir is putting on.

R: Could you describe your church?

M: I think it's beautiful. It's Early American. Everyone seems to get along so well. I think it's a beautiful family. Our church is known to be one of the most friendly churches in the district here. Any new people that come in, we try to make them feel at home. Right away they're invited to different things we think would be interesting for them or what they would be interested in. I just think it's a beautiful church.

R: How many members are there to the congregation?

M: I image around--I don't know for sure--but I imagine around 950 or 1,000 or less.

R: What kind of organizations are established by the church to get the people involved?

M: We have a Methodist Women's group, which has a general meeting once a month. Then we have four different circles that meet through the day. We have a prayer group. There's a lot of things go on that I do not attend. I mean, I just don't have time or sort of lost interest, more or less, as I get older. You slow down and can't get yourself involved in everything. I'm sure they're up to date on all their meetings. I know we have women who are very dedicated. They travel around all over the state for the different meetings for the district churches.

R: Which value do you stress most in your family or did?

Was it religion, education, career, hard work?

M: I think everything takes hard work. You have to work at it if you want to make it go. When the children were home, we insisted they attend their church and Sunday School. We were always happy when we knew they were at church for some reason or other, different meetings and all. Our son was active in the youth of the church when he was in the church working. He was the president of the district youth. Of course, our daughters were always active in the youth and the young people's groups and choir.

R: What are some of the activities that are performed by the church today to help raise up money to keep the church functioning? Do you still have that concession stand at the Canfield Fair?

M: No, we don't have that any more and we don't put on as many dinners as we used to. We used to have lots of dinners and were known for our dinners in and around the district. They do serve some dinners to different groups. Of course, that money is used a lot of times for missions. We helped to support Pearl Street Mission. I guess maybe that's known under a different name right now.

They don't have a men's group any more in our church, but the men a lot of them are active in the Organization of Protestant Men. I know they belong to that. That helps keep up the chaplain at the hospitals. They're several of those men in the Protestant Men. They have their own chaplain that goes to the hospitals and to the jails. Our men, I know, support that.

R: How are the people in the church reacting to our present crisis?

M: They seem to be reacting real well. I know now we have a new group formed in our church that is supposed to look after the elderly and senior citizens. We have a senior citizen's group in our church. There's about eight women, I think, that do volunteer work in that, attend their meetings. Our Women's Society puts on a Thanksgiving and a Christmas dinner for them and charge more or less just enough to pay for the groceries. They are charged very little.

I know our church does a lot for outside work. Not too long ago we had missionaries there from the Red Bird Mission down in Kentucky. They have promised to help

them out with their needs, I'm sure we're doing our part to help take care of the needs,

This new group is meeting the needs of the elderly who need rides to the hospitals or doctors; see that their needs are taken care of.

R: Mrs. McCauley, are there any other events that might have occurred, which you haven't mentioned, that you would like to maybe share with us at this time?

M: I can't think of any right now.

R: What was the most major event that you think stands out in most of the people's minds?

M: I think just being involved with the church is their main object. I'm sure that they could get a helping hand from our church at any time. We are very thoughtful and kind to anyone that comes; being like one big family.

R: Where do you see your church going in the near future?

M: I'm sure I hope someday we will probably outgrow it. When it was built we thought, "My it was too large. We never needed that large of a church." But right now we're using every room. We have seen it grow from 400 or 500 to now over 1,000. I suppose someday it will be thousands. I hope we will outgrow this church someday by getting new members.

R: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us today about your church in general?

M: I think a lot of our church. I hate to miss our church service. I'm proud to take anyone there. I couldn't live without my church.

R: Mrs. McCauley, on behalf of Youngstown State University and myself I would like to express my deepest appreciation for your time and effort today. Thank you.

M: You're welcome, I'm sure.

END OF INTERVIEW